

# Guardians of the Old at the Dawn of the New

## The Role of Angels According to the Pauline Letters

DOMINIKA A. KUREK-CHOMYCZ, LEUVEN / REIMUND BIERINGER, LEUVEN<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Preliminary Considerations

Ninety years ago Maurice Jones in his study on “St. Paul and the Angels” marvelled at how little significance Paul attributed to angels, especially as compared with some other books of the New Testament: “It may not be strictly true ... that the Apostle makes the angel, as a type, antagonistic to God and man, but his general outlook in this connexion is such as to justify us in assuming a very substantial departure from the view held in common by our Lord and the primitive Christian Church.”<sup>2</sup> Modern readers may not share Jones’ apologetic concern to prove that Paul did not depart from Jesus’ teaching with regard to the core of Christian faith, and most will feel uncomfortable with Jones’ uncritical acceptance of the role of angels in the Synoptics and Acts as the direct reflection of their importance to “our Lord and the primitive Christian Church”. The basic question that he poses, however, remains valid, as even a quick survey of Pauline references to angels will make one realize how limited is the role that angels play in the Epistles.

There have been various attempts to examine the question, yet only a few comprehensive studies. General works aimed at analysing Paul’s angelology were written mostly at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Typically, the departure point for most of them

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2 Jones, Paul 361.

3 The first systematic study of Paul’s view on angels was a monograph published in 1888 by Otto Everling (Everling, *Angelologie*). He mainly turned to apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts for parallels. In his rather nuanced analysis he reached the conclusion that Paul opposed a mediatory role of the angels in view of the one God and the one Lord and that for this reason the angels lost their meaning for the Christian: “Mitten in jener Zeit, in welcher die Engelvorstellungen eine solche ausgedehn-

seems to be the presupposition of a basic dualism in the angelic world. Yet while this might have been the assumption with which the authors began their work, their examination of the Pauline texts often leads them to the conclusion that such a simple distinction between good and evil angels is difficult to detect in Paul's letters.<sup>4</sup>

While until roughly the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we come across a number of articles with grandiose titles referring to Paul's "doctrine" on angels,<sup>5</sup> or to "angelic hierarchies" according to Paul,<sup>6</sup> more recently claims to comprehensive accounts of Pauline angelology have rather been relegated to popular articles, and general overviews can now be found for the most part in the dictionaries.<sup>7</sup> Having realized that it is scarcely possible to construct a systematic account of Paul's "angelology" based on his erratic references, scholars prefer to focus rather on one aspect of the question or just one passage, instead of trying to encompass the entire realm of heavenly beings as depicted in the Pauline literature. The amount and variety of designations attributed to these entities is best illustrated by the fact that dictionary articles dealing with angels in the Pauline literature, next to ἄγγελοι typically refer to a

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te Verbreitung und Bedeutung hatten, weist er im Interesse des einen Gottes und einen Herrn jede religiös vermittelnde Stellung der mit dem Gesetz so eng verbundenen Engel zurück, sie sind für den Christen bedeutungslos und nur armselige und schwache Geister" (Everling, *Angelologie* 125). Dibelius, *Geisterwelt*, continued the work of Everling and complemented it by turning also to midrashic and Talmudic material as the potential background of Paul's angelology. His goal was also to make the link between Paul's angelology and his other religious and theological ideas (cf. Dibelius, *Geisterwelt* 4). Georg Kurze took up the topic again in 1915 in a dissertation defended in Breslau (cf. Kurze, *Engelsglaube*; this publication only contains the first part of the dissertation). Kurze offered a primarily contextual approach which tried to make sense of Paul's angelology from within the totality of Paul's theology. He distinguished more clearly than Everling or Dibelius between angels who are the friends and angels who are the enemies of human beings, and had no doubt that they are qualified morally (cf. Kurze, *Engelsglaube* 29). His final assessment of the place of angels in Paul's theology, however, did not differ fundamentally from that of Everling: "Im Mittelpunkt der Predigt Pauli steht Christus. Auf ihn strebt alles hin. Zu ihm hat der Apostel auch die Geister in Beziehung gesetzt" (Kurze, *Engelsglaube* 5).

- 4 Cf. Everling, *Angelologie* 118: "Dem Apostel des scharfen, principiellen, Entweder – oder! zerfallen die Engel nicht in entweder böse oder gute, entweder sündige oder absolut sündlose Geister." He immediately hastens to add, however: "Selbstverständlich kommt es uns nicht in den Sinn, damit jeden Unterschied in der Geisterwelt nach seinem Bewußtsein zu leugnen".
- 5 E.g., Roets, *Doctrina*; Moran, *Paul's Doctrine*.
- 6 E.g., de los Ríos, *Paulus*.
- 7 Even when "angelology" and "demonology" still make their way into the title, as in Pierre Benoit's interesting essay, the subtitle immediately makes it clear that the object of the article is much more limited (cf. Benoit, *Angelologie*).

cluster of other terms.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, it is those other heavenly entities, first and foremost ἀρχαί καὶ ἐξουσίαι, that appear to have gained more scholarly attention than ἄγγελοι.<sup>9</sup> This fascination with “powers and principalities” and other related terms is to a certain extent understandable given the originality of some of the designations.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless lumping together all the supernatural beings is not necessarily warranted by the text. In fact in the undisputed Paulines the language of “powers” is fairly modest and limited. The only passage where ἄγγελοι are mentioned alongside ἀρχαί is Rom 8:38, and there is only one passage in the homologoumena, 1Cor 15:24, where we find ἀρχή, ἐξουσία and δύναμις together, the terms that are often associated with the characteristic Pauline “powers” vocabulary.<sup>11</sup> In 1Cor 15:24, this terminology, however, is much less prominent than in passages such as Col 1:16 or Eph 1:21 and especially 6:12. In addition, the supposedly typical combination ἀρχή and ἐξουσία, which appears only once in the homologoumena, occurs much more frequently in Colossians and Ephesians (three times in each of those letters), either in the singular as in 1Cor 15:24 or, more often, in the plural. ἄγγελοι on the other hand never occur in Ephesians and only once in Colossians, yet *not* in connection with other powers.

8 The terms typically associated with ἄγγελος are the following (in alphabetical order): ἀρχάγγελος; ἀρχή; ἄρχων; δαιμόνιον; δύναμις; ἐξουσία; θρόνος; κοσμοκράτωρ τοῦ σκότους τούτου; κυριότης; σατανᾶς; στοιχεῖον. Cf. also βελιάρ; διάβολος; θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; ὁ πειράζων; ὁ ποιήρ.

9 A glance at some titles of books and articles already illustrates this. For Pauline letters see, e.g., Caird, *Principalities*; MacGregor, *Principalities*; more recently Forbes, *Principalities*; for the NT in general: Schlier, *Mächte*; Wink, *Naming*. Notably, Carr mentions both “angels” and “principalities” in his title, but only discusses in some detail those “angel” passages in which he perceives a connection between angels and other powers (cf. Carr, *Angels* 66-72, 112-114).

10 In contrast to the designations for supernatural beings well known from contemporary and earlier Jewish literature, such as angels, demons, Satan etc., the background of the “powers and principalities” terminology is still debated. Benoit’s article demonstrates well how limited the results are that a search for the origin of most of those designations in Jewish literature yields. Cf. his conclusion: “Il faut avouer que l’origine précise de la nomenclature paulinienne des Puissances célestes n’est pas encore pleinement éclaircie (Benoit, *Angélogologie* 227).” For a more detailed consideration of the language of powers see Wink, *Naming*. More recently Forbes, *Demonology*, has persuasively argued that we should seek the roots of some of those terms in popular Greek philosophy rather than in Jewish apocalyptic writings.

11 It is thus astonishing that authors who explicitly distinguish between the undisputed and disputed Paulines, as does Forbes, can still argue that in this regard “the usage of terms and concepts ... is reasonably consistent across both categories” (Forbes, *Principalities* 62, n. 6). Forbes does nevertheless need to admit that it is “richer and more developed in Ephesians and Colossians” (Forbes, *Principalities* 62, n. 6). Cf. also his comment on Rom 8:38: “this is the only passage in Paul that links the term ‘angel’ to his own *preferred* terminology.” (Forbes, *Principalities* 68; our emphasis).

Concerning the last term often associated with angels and “powers”, there is an ongoing debate as to whether *στοιχεῖα* belong to the same category or not, or even if they refer to spiritual beings at all.

The aforementioned tendency of the earlier studies to categorize Pauline angels as “good” or “evil” continues in more recent works. Since the majority of the references are not entirely positive, many, especially earlier studies, tended to characterize various Pauline powers as “evil”, no doubt under the influence of certain passages in Colossians and Ephesians, especially Eph 6:12.<sup>12</sup> There have, admittedly, also been attempts to present the diverse powers as unequivocally positive, most famously by Wesley Carr,<sup>13</sup> but his monograph has come under substantial criticism and has not been met with much acceptance. On the whole it seems that the speculation as to the “morality” of various heavenly beings is more of a concern for later interpreters than for Paul himself, for his interest is usually limited to how they function. This is at least true for beings explicitly labelled as *ἄγγελοι*, to which the Apostle never applies an absolute “moral” qualification, although in passages like 2Cor 11:14 the contrast implies that *ἄγγελος φωτός*, as opposed to *σατανᾶς*, is to be taken as a positive designation.

These preliminary remarks have hopefully shown how our interpretation of Paul’s angelic realm will ultimately depend on our individual interests and presuppositions. Which of the letters we deem to have been written by Paul, in particular whether we include Colossians and/or Ephesians in our investigation will influence to a considerable degree the results thereof. Our own preconceptions concerning the spiritual world, most importantly the extent to which we envisage it in dualistic terms, need not be underestimated, either. Finally, whether we limit ourselves to the beings explicitly referred to as *ἄγγελοι*, or if we include also other heavenly entities, will certainly affect our understanding. Since as we have indicated, angels in Pauline letters are quite distinct from other “powers”, and it would in any case be impossible to consider all the “powers” in any detail in this paper, the rest of our contribution to this volume on angels will focus on the passages where *ἄγγελοι*, in the plural or singular, are explicitly mentioned. Since another traditional entity, Satan, occurs with a similar frequency in the Pauline letters as angels, and in two verses is even explicitly associated

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12 The following quotation from Broer, *ἄγγελος* 14, is typical: “Whereas the Evangelists clearly emphasize statements about the angels of God ..., the Pauline corpus is nearly as clear in its emphasis on statements about the evil (fallen) angels and the demonic powers and authorities”.

13 Carr, *Angels*. In order to present all the powers and principalities as unambiguously positive, Carr had to assume that Eph 6:12 was an interpolation.

with the latter, it could be argued that Satan should also be included in our discussion. To our mind, however, in most occurrences σατανᾶς appears to have quite a distinct task assigned, so we deem it justified to limit our analysis to angels alone, commenting on σατανᾶς only when the word appears in direct connection with ἄγγελος.

## 2. General Observations

In the Hebrew Bible one of the main functions of angels was that of mediators between humans and God. This is clearly presupposed in Paul's references to angels in Galatians. As our comments on specific passages will make clear, the place where an allusion to some biblical accounts is most plausible is Gal 4:14. On the whole, however, a comparison with the functions of angels in the Hebrew Bible shows<sup>14</sup> that there are not many explicit parallels between the role of angels in the Pauline letters and the Hebrew Bible. It would obviously be gratuitous to expect that we find in Paul's letters angels involved in all the activities known from the Hebrew Bible or from other Jewish literature for that matter, given that he is not writing a systematic account of angelology. It is nonetheless noteworthy that they do not appear in the places where we could expect them. For example the only "angel" that is mentioned in the context of the heavenly ascent in 2Cor 12, is the angel of Satan! No angels are ever seen by Paul in a vision, nor are they involved in the preparation of such a vision. The only possible reference to angels seen in a vision by (certain) believers could be Col 2:18. Remarkable is also the absence of angels in the account of Paul's conversion.<sup>15</sup>

In one aspect, however, Paul's attitude toward angels seems to resemble that of the Hebrew Bible, especially of the earlier, pre-exilic books: he is not interested in speculative angelology, but he does nevertheless seem to take the existence of angels for granted, limiting his interest, however, to the functional aspect. They are not named nor do we find any speculation regarding their nature. What is more, in gen-

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14 Cf. Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* 61-63, who distinguishes around twenty functions of angels in the Hebrew Bible.

15 Even Luke does not mention any angels in this context. Incidentally, it might also be worth noting that Luke, who in the Acts of the Apostles does not refrain from referring to angels in various contexts (the term ἄγγελος occurs 21 times in Acts), seems reluctant to associate his favourite hero with angels: only toward the end of the narrative, in chapter 27, does he for the first and only time associate an angel with Paul.

eral there is no clear distinction into good and bad angels; their “character” depends on the task assigned to them.<sup>16</sup>

The surprise of interpreters that Paul assigns such a limited role to angels is often prompted by the fact that angels supposedly abounded in much of the Second Temple Jewish literature. Yet as Carol A. Newsom rightly notes, “the concentration of extensive angelological speculation in certain genres of literature (esp. apocalypses) and in the literature of certain communities (e.g., Qumran) reminds one that the religious and intellectual significance of angelology differed among various Jewish groups”.<sup>17</sup> In spite of the absence of speculative angelology and lack of interest in angelic hierarchies in Paul, commentators have pointed to some possible parallels between specific Pauline passages and Second Temple literature.<sup>18</sup> There have also been attempts to search for parallels in the Qumran documents, and it is plausible that the one of the two main domains where angels are depicted in Qumran, namely worship, is also a domain that Paul apparently associated with angels, however paradoxical his reference may be.<sup>19</sup> All this might well imply certain shared beliefs, but this does not need to be overemphasized, especially since many of the alleged “parallels” are far from certain. In sum, since also in postexilic Judaism there is no unified angelology, we should not be surprised that the Pauline letters do not conform to any preconceived notion we might have on the “Jewish” view on angels.

Given that in the LXX the term ἄγγελος could designate both heavenly beings and human messengers, we cannot be sure that at all the Pauline occurrences the substantive is to be understood as a technical term. This is reflected in some of the translations, where ἄγγελος, usually rendered as “angel”, in certain passages is translated as “messenger”, or at least the latter term is mentioned as an alternative translation in a note. It is not always easy to ascertain which meaning is intended. While in some passages indeed a non-technical meaning might be implied, in no given passage is there a clear indication that the reference is to a human messenger. Humans are at most compared to but not identified with ἄγγελοι (cf. Gal 4:14), although it is imaginable for them to attain some of the angelic capacities, such as speaking in the tongue of angels (1Cor 13:1).

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16 Cf. Kuhn, *Angelology* 217, and the quotation from Barton that he gives.

17 Newsom, *Angels* 252.

18 See our discussion of individual passages in section 3 below.

19 Cf. our comments on 1Cor 11:10.

### 3. Ἄγγελοι in the Proto-Pauline Epistles

In the previous section we made some general observations on angels in the Pauline letters. In this section we propose to comment on specific passages where the term ἄγγελος occurs.

We begin with 1Thess 4:16, where we encounter the only occurrence of ἀρχάγγελος in the Pauline literature (and one of the only two in the entire New Testament; the other one is in Jude 9). In the description of the parousia, the Lord is portrayed as playing the central role, accompanied by traditional signs of the end times, such as the cry of command, shout and trumpet. These are all common elements of apocalyptic imagery, so this passage does not involve specific difficulties as far as the imagery is concerned, yet it is not entirely clear how to understand the three prepositional phrases. “Does God issue the directive and therefore Jesus acts at God’s command accompanied by two other signs or does Jesus, marking the beginning of the parousia, give a loud command, which is put into effect by the angel and trumpet?”<sup>20</sup> The latter seems more plausible, so the two prepositional phrases, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, are most likely “used exegetically to explain ‘the cry of command’ and the connective is translated as ‘that is’”.<sup>21</sup> That the angels’ voice was powerful is not unexpected,<sup>22</sup> just as their involvement in apocalyptic events. ἀρχάγγελος does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, but is well known from Early Jewish, especially apocalyptic literature. Here the voice of the archangel serves most likely to announce the parousia, adding splendour to the coming of Jesus. His voice could also have the practical purpose to awaken the dead. That Paul’s interest was not in the archangel as such but in how he served the image is attested by the fact that he is not even named<sup>23</sup> and does not receive any further characterization.

The second longest letter in the Pauline corpus is the letter with the greatest number of references to angels. ἄγγελοι are mentioned four times in 1Corinthians, always in the plural. Their role in all of those passages is surprisingly passive, even if we are not always sure what exactly this role consisted in.

In 1Cor 4:9 apostles are said to “have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals”. It is reasonable to take ἄγγελοι and

20 Richard, *Thessalonians* 229.

21 Richard, *Thessalonians* 229.

22 Is 6:4 mentions the “voice” of Seraphim; Dan 10:6 characterizes the voice of a man who is identified as angel as being “like the roar of a multitude.” Cf. also Rev 1:10; 14:2; 19:6.

23 Cf. Bruce, *Thessalonians* 100.

ἀνθρώποι as specifying what κόσμος means in this context.<sup>24</sup> Angels are thus, as created beings,<sup>25</sup> part of the world, and they do not necessarily need to understand the full implications of the Christ event. Thus they marvel at the sight of the apostles. The often negative connotation of κόσμος notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that in 2Cor 5:19 God is said to be reconciling the κόσμος to himself. Does that include angels?

In 1Cor 6:3 Paul, rebuking some members of the Corinthian community who were taking to court other believers, asks them whether they do not realize that Christians are destined to judge not merely everyday matters, but even angels. The majority of the commentators would like to see in this verse “a reference to the apocalyptic theme of the judgment of fallen angels”.<sup>26</sup> This remains a possibility but cannot be established with any certainty. To our mind, what is essential in this statement, is that it demonstrates the newly acquired exalted status of humans (or at least the believers), exemplified among others in their authority to judge angels.<sup>27</sup>

In 1Cor 11:10 angels – or rather *the* angels – are again spectators, yet this is a verse that has provoked more discussion than all the other references to angels in this letter taken together. It belongs to a passage (11:2-16) where, as one of the authors notes, “each verse is beset with intriguing problems”.<sup>28</sup> The text contains Paul’s instructions concerning proper head covering during worship,<sup>29</sup> using arguments from the order of creation. In the verse under consideration the main problems pertain to two items: how to understand the first part, since it is not evident what ἐξουσία means in this context, and second, what exactly the phrase διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους refers to. As for the first difficulty, we agree with Joël Delobel that ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπί with genitive, in line with the use of the phrase in the New Testament, is best understood as ‘have

24 Cf. the comment of Collins, *Corinthians* 188: “Paul presents himself and Apollos as providing entertainment ... for the entire cosmos, humans and angels alike”. See also Fee, *Epistle* 175.

25 Cf. our comments on Rom 8:38-39 below.

26 Collins, *Corinthians* 232. Cf. his references to 2Pet 2:4 and Jude 6; as well as 1Enoch 10:11-14; 67-68; and possibly 91:15. Similar texts are mentioned in many of the earlier commentaries.

27 Sullivan, *Wrestling* 170, observes that “This would imply a superiority of humans over angels (cf. Heb 2:5), which in turn would certainly suggest a strong distinction between humans and angels”.

28 Delobel, *Interpretation* 369. See Delobel, *Interpretation* n. 1 for a selection of some important publications on the passage.

29 Some exegetes interpret the passage as referring to hair dress rather than to head covering. As Delobel, *Interpretation* 370, notes, the argumentation offered to support this view by Murphy-O’Connor, *Sex*, is most elaborate, but Murphy-O’Connor was not the first one to propose such an interpretation.



authority / exercise control over something', so the problematic clause in 11:10 could be rendered as "woman should have control over her head". But why "because of the angels"? There have been various attempts to solve this *crux interpretum*,<sup>30</sup> most of them beginning with the assumption that the text must refer *either* to good or evil/fallen angels.<sup>31</sup> Those who argue for the latter refer to the tradition known from LXX Gen 6:2, where angels (the Hebrew text has here "sons of God"), attracted by the beauty of human women, are reported to have had sexual intercourse with them. This brief reference was substantially elaborated in some of the OT Pseudepigrapha, and as L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte contends, it is quite likely that the legend of the Watchers was known to Paul.<sup>32</sup> Such an understanding of 1Cor 11:10 is often rejected on the grounds that nothing in the context suggests a reference to Gen 6:2 or any later version of the legend.<sup>33</sup> Authors who oppose this interpretation usually observe that since the context is that of worship and Paul's arguments are based on the order of creation, it is most logical to assume that the angels referred to in this passage are guardians of the created order and/or, are assisting at gatherings of public worship.<sup>34</sup>

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30 Fitzmyer, *Feature* 195-198, helpfully summarizes the main interpretations. For some more recent bibliographical references see BeDuhn, *Angels*.

31 A notable exception is BeDuhn, *Angels*, but his own suggestion that Paul attributes gender division to angels rather than God is rather farfetched. He is correct, however, to stress the ambivalent nature of the angels in 11:10 and the opposition apparent in the Pauline letters between the old created order where angels played a prominent role (although he probably overemphasizes their significance in regarding them as the originators rather than its guardians) and the new creation in Christ.

32 Cf. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Man* 89. Lietaert Peerbolte briefly comments on how the legend was reworked in Jubilees, 1En, some Qumran texts, and finally the Testament of Reuben. According to Fitzmyer, *Feature* 196, Tertullian was the first to understand the reference to the angels in 1Cor 11:10 as indicating fallen angels.

33 Hooker, *Authority* 412, says that two main arguments against "evil" angels are that first, "nowhere else in the New Testament are angels thought of as evil; second ... the idea is totally irrelevant to the context of the passage". Interestingly, the argument regarded by Fitzmyer, *Feature* 197, as the "most decisive" one, apparently contradicts Hooker's first argument. According to Fitzmyer, "*angeloi*, used with the article, never designates bad or fallen angels in the Pauline writings" (Fitzmyer, *Feature*). This might imply that when the term is anarthrous, evil angels *could* be meant.

34 Delobel, *Interpretation* 385-386, observes that even though "the reference to angels is doomed to remain cryptic to the modern reader, these two elements ... may suffice to provide reasonable explanation of διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους: the behaviour of women in worship has to respect the order of creation symbolized by the angels who are indeed present in worship and watching the observance of this order." Fitzmyer, *Feature* 198, prefers to separate the two functions, focussing on the angels' presence in worship. Based on the Qumran evidence that he presents, he argues that "the unveiled head of a woman is like a bodily defect which should be excluded from such

One might wonder, however, whether these interpretations are really mutually exclusive, or if they have been regarded as such due to the scholars' assumption that angels necessarily had to fit neatly in one category, that is, they had to be either good or evil. The article by Lietaert Peerbolte, even if not all of his arguments might be compelling, shows that it is possible to merge the major interpretations into a coherent whole.<sup>35</sup> Angels who attended worship could be essentially "good" angels, just as were at the outset the Watchers, yet there was a potential danger that the "fall" of the Watchers might reoccur.<sup>36</sup>

While the belief in the presence of angels during worship is in line with traditions attested in contemporary Jewish literature, one would expect Christian worship to be rather a harbinger of the new order, instead of a site of preservation of the old, and as a result, it could come as a surprise that they should act here as guardians of the old order of creation. It strikes the modern reader that in the passage under consideration their presence is used to endorse traditions which can be seen as oppressive to women. The emphasis on the differences between men and women in 1Cor 11:2-16 seems to stand in contrast to Gal 3:28. As a result, even an allegedly positive understanding of the function of angels in 1Cor 11:10 turns out to be problematic. Even if there is no danger of seducing the Corinthian women, the angels' role in 1Cor 11:10 remains rather ambiguous.

We encounter ἄγγελοι for the last time in 1Corinthians in the first verse of the hymn on love. In 1Cor 13:1 Paul asserts that even if he could speak ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων, but he did not have love, he would become "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal". This conditional statement does not tell us anything about the probability of the condition expressed in the protasis.<sup>37</sup> 1Cor 14:18 indicates that Paul could speak in tongues "more than all the other Corinthians", but it is not clear whether we can identify his speaking in tongues with the "tongues of angels". 13:1 as well as the verses that follow contain an implicit critique of those who excessively strive for spiritual gifts, neglecting the rightful attitude toward other brothers and sisters. The gift of tongues, just as all the other gifts, although good in itself, is rendered meaningless when devoid of love. The specific mention of the "tongues of angels", alongside those "of humans" could simply be a hyperbolic expression to signify the totality of the gift of tongues. However, it

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an assembly, 'because holy angels are present in their congregation'" (Fitzmyer, *Feature* 200). Cf. also Cadbury, *Qumran*.

35 Lietaert Peerbolte, *Man*.

36 Cf. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Man* 88.

37 On the third class conditionals see the comments on Gal 1:8 below.

could also offer evidence that angels were believed to speak a distinct language, which humans could possibly learn, or at least be capable of using in ecstatic experiences. Commentators usually point to T. Job 48-50, where Job's daughters are said to speak the angelic dialect. Raymond Collins, criticizing those who take ἀγγέλων as a hyperbolic expression, argues that "Paul's phrase appears to designate the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. Parallels in the *Testament of Job* confirm that this is the connotation of Paul's phrase".<sup>38</sup> It is an exaggeration to say that the parallel *confirms* this, but a similar phenomenon cannot be excluded. It should be noted, however, that the context in the *Testament of Job* is particularly positive. The passage depicts angelomorphic transformation which Job's daughters Hermera, Kasia, and Amaltheia's Horn experience, when they put on the strings that they had received as inheritance from their father. As a result they undergo an internal change of heart: no longer concerned about worldly matters, they are now focussed entirely on the worship of God.<sup>39</sup> If Paul indeed had in mind beliefs such as the one attested in the *Testament of Job*, then he used them in a rather polemical manner, for that which sufficed for the daughters of Job to have their hearts changed and attain an exalted status, is in 1Cor 13:1 disparaged as not capable of leading to what brings us closest to God, that is love. Possibly echoes of this view could be detected in Rom 8:38-39.

In 2Corinthians Paul refers to ἄγγελος twice, namely in 11:14 and in 12:7 where he uses ἄγγελος φωτός and ἄγγελος σατανᾶ respectively. In 11:12-15 Paul directs a polemical attack against his opponents. Three times Paul uses middle forms of the verb μετασχηματίζω in these verses with the reflexive meaning "disguise oneself". "False apostles" are accused of disguising themselves as apostles of Christ (11:13), Satan of disguising himself as "angel of light" (11:14) and the διάκονοι of Satan of disguising themselves as διάκονοι δικαιοσύνης (11:15). With these three Paul uses a concentric structure (a-b-a'). Both the first and the last pair characterize the opponents while the one in the middle refers to Satan. The middle statement (b) is at first only introduced as a comparison in the service of an *a minore ad maius* argument.<sup>40</sup> What is true of the lesser is illustrated as also true of the greater. In this way the claims are presented as more convincing. In the a' statement Paul goes a step further in his polemic invective and explicitly links the opponents to Satan (οἱ διάκονοι αὐτοῦ).

38 Collins, *Corinthians* 475.

39 Cf. Sullivan, *Sexuality* 222.

40 See Furnish, *Corinthians* 510.

In 11:12-15 Paul uses the following antitheses: ψευδαπόστολοι and ἐργάται δόλιοι vs. ἀπόστολοι Χριστοῦ, ὁ σατανᾶς vs. ἄγγελος φωτός and οἱ διάκονοι αὐτοῦ [of Satan] vs. διάκονοι δικαιοσύνης. Here the positive pole of the antithesis is formed by Christ, φῶς and δικαιοσύνη, the negative pole by σατανᾶς and lie/deceit (ψευδ- and δόλιος). In 3:7-18 and 4:6 Paul had clearly linked Christ with δόξα, φῶς and δικαιοσύνη. In 2:11 he had accused Satan of taking advantage of people and cheating them. In 4:4 Paul had stated that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”. In 11:14 the opposition is not explicitly between light and darkness as in 4:4,6.<sup>41</sup> The focus is more on honesty and allegiance (to Christ or to Satan).

From the perspective of Paul’s view on angels what he says in 11:12-15 raises two questions: first, what is the origin and meaning of ἄγγελος φωτός?<sup>42</sup> Second, where does Paul get the idea of Satan’s deceptive masquerading as an angel? The expression ἄγγελος φωτός<sup>43</sup> is unique in our context, even though it is in line with light phenomena that are associated with angels (cf. Lk 2:9 and 24:9). In the Dead Sea Scrolls we meet “the Angel of Darkness”<sup>44</sup> and the expression “the brightness of angels” is found in the Life of Adam and Eve 9:1. For the second question scholars unfailingly refer to the Apoc. Mos. 17:1 where an addition to the biblical fall narrative reads: τότε ὁ σατανᾶς ἐγένετο ἐν εἶδει ἀγγέλου καὶ ὕμνει τὸν θεὸν καθάπερ οἱ ἄγγελοι. καὶ παρακύψασα ἐκ τοῦ τείχους ἴδον αὐτὸν ὅμοιον ἀγγέλου. The second apocryphal book that has a parallel is the L.A.E. 9:1 where a second attempt of Satan to seduce Eve is described: “*et transierunt dies XVIII. tunc iratus est Satanias et transfiguravit se in claritatem angelorum et abiit ad Tigrem flumen ad Evam*”. While it is by no means certain that Paul knew of these or similar traditions, these parallels show that what Paul says here with regard to Satan and angels is not completely unprecedented.<sup>45</sup>

41 See also 2Cor 6:14 ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος; As the Pauline authenticity is disputed here, we shall not use this verse in our line of argument.

42 Cf. the remark of Everling, Angelologie 59: “Auch für die Angelologie ist die Aussage durch den Terminus ἄγγελος τοῦ φωτός von Bedeutung, der das Vorhandensein eines Unterschiedes in der Geisterwelt bestätigt.”

43 For a detailed discussion of the different possible meanings of ἄγγελος φωτός see Harris, Epistle 774.

44 “... All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness. The Angel of Darkness leads all the children of righteousness astray” (1QS 3:18-25, translation G. Vermez).

45 Harris, Epistle 774, points out that in T. Job Satan disguises himself “as a beggar (6:4), as the king of the Persians (17:2), as a great whirlwind (20:5) and as a bread seller (23:1).

The only other place where ἄγγελος is used in 2Corinthians is 12:7: διὸ ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, ἵνα με κολαφίσῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι. In 12:7 ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is an apposition to the σκόλοψ which was given into Paul's flesh. Paul refers to the "thorn" as ἄγγελος σατανᾶ. This is one of the reasons why ἄγγελος here is often seen as having its general meaning "messenger"<sup>46</sup> instead of the more specific "angel".<sup>47</sup> In addition the question is also whether in the expression ἄγγελος σατανᾶ the emphasis is on ἄγγελος or on σατανᾶ, on those who work in Satan's service or on Satan himself.<sup>48</sup> The understanding of ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is closely related to the interpretation of σκόλοψ. In the immense number of interpretations of the σκόλοψ<sup>49</sup> three main groups can be distinguished. For those who consider the opponents to be the "thorn" in Paul's flesh, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ refers to human beings who are in the service of Satan. To support this view, some authors refer to 11:15 where Paul calls the opponents διάκονοι of Satan.<sup>50</sup> It is, however, rare in the NT that ἄγγελος refers to a human being. For the second group which sees in the σκόλοψ an illness of one kind or another, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is seen as a personification of the illness or as a cause metonymy, i.e. the cause, the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ stands for the effect, the physical illness. The third group interprets the σκόλοψ as some moral-spiritual temptation. Here the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is seen as the enemy of chastity, the adversary who prevents the proclamation of the gospel or who causes unbelief or as the one who causes Paul's outbursts of anger. It is not easy to take a decision between the second and the third position. In the NT Satan is both presented as the tempter and as the one who causes illness.

On the basis of the information of the context in 2Cor 12:1-10 it is very difficult to take any decisions concerning most of the disputed areas in contemporary research which were surveyed above. No matter what the correct answers might be, the most important aspect clearly is that when Paul wants to be liberated from the "thorn", he does not turn

46 In many English translations we find "messenger of Satan" (exception: e.g., New American Bible).

47 The expression ἄγγελος σατανᾶ as such is unique in the New Testament. If it refers to the angel of Satan the question is whether in the contemporary angelology Satan was understood to have angels. Most commentators point to Mt 25:41 and Rev 12:7.9 for an answer. Mt 25:41 speaks about the devil (ὁ διάβολος) and his angels. Rev 12:7 speaks about the dragon and his angels as opposed to Michael and his angels. In 12:9 the dragon is identified as διάβολος καὶ ὁ σατανᾶς.

48 For many interpreters it would have made little difference had Paul written σατανᾶς instead of ἄγγελος σατανᾶ.

49 For a recent overview see Thrall, Commentary 809-816.

50 Cf. also Joannes Chrysostomus, Hom. 2Cor. 26 (PG 61, 575-584, esp. 577-578) who understood the messenger of Satan to be specific opponents of Paul: Alexander (2Tim 4:14), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2Tim 2:17) and others who opposed the gospel.

to the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ nor to Satan himself, but to the Lord. The answer of the Lord ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου (12:9) shows that Satan does not have the final word. What ultimately counts is the χάρις τοῦ κυρίου and the δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

In Galatians the term ἄγγελος is used three times which, taking into account the length of the letter, is relatively frequent. Some scholars tend to explain this by referring to the hypothetical teaching of Paul's opponents in which supposedly angels played an important role.<sup>51</sup> Yet such a reasoning is prone to all the pitfalls of mirror reading, allowing little room for Paul's originality. In consequence, while it cannot be excluded that the angel verses in Galatians are indeed a direct polemic with some items of the opponents' preaching, it is more fruitful to consider them in so far as they can tell us something about Paul's own understanding of angels.

In Gal 1:8-9 Paul pronounces an anathema on anyone who would proclaim a gospel contrary to what he had proclaimed to the Galatians. In v.8 he states that even if he himself or an angel from heaven, ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ were to preach such a gospel, they should be anathema. This is expressed by means of a conditional statement, beginning with a protasis introduced by the conjunction εἰάν with the present subjunctive (εὐαγγελίζεται). Conditional clauses have been variously classified by grammarians, but according to the division one encounters in standard textbooks, εἰάν followed by the present subjunctive expresses the *modus eventualis*, often defined as a future condition of fact with an element of doubt. Such an understanding is reflected in some commentaries, and thus, for example, Richard Longenecker asserts that "the subjunctive mood is used because Paul is making a statement that is *somewhat* doubtful, though theoretically possible."<sup>52</sup> That the terminology involved in traditional definitions is often problematic is well attested by the following remark of Maximilian Zerwick. Observing that "eventual" is often understood as "probable", he notes that "the term «probable» is misleading as applied to this class of condition, as it may quite properly be used of an eventuality regarded as highly unlikely to arise".<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, in commenting on this category, he adds: "Irony

51 See, e.g., Martyn, Galatians, whose comments on 1:8 and 3:19 make it clear that according to him both passages are a polemic against what the Galatians would have heard in the "Teachers'" sermons.

52 Longenecker, Galatians 16 (our emphasis). Earlier on in the same paragraph he makes it explicit that this assertion is due to his understanding of this class of conditionals: "The protasis of this verse is in the form of a third class 'future more probable' condition, where what is expressed is a matter of some doubt but with the possibility of realization".

53 Zerwick, Greek 109.

... allows the use of this form for an impossible condition, treated simply as an eventuality".<sup>54</sup>

In view of the foregoing, it seems that Paul's conditional statement in Gal 1:8 is full of irony. It certainly does not imply the *probability* of himself or an angel from heaven proclaiming a false gospel.<sup>55</sup> There is nothing in the verse that would indicate that ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ could be an evil angel. Yet since references to angels in Paul's letters are so ambiguous, in order to clarify the phrase further it will be useful to consider briefly what Paul has to say about heaven. οὐρανός, which in the undisputed Paulines occurs usually in the singular, has generally a positive connotation and is often associated with Christ and/or God. A notable exception is 1Cor 8:5 where both heaven and earth are referred to as the dwelling place of "so-called gods", as opposed to the one God, the Father and one Lord, Jesus Christ. If an "angel from heaven" were indeed to preach a false gospel, he would probably be like those false gods. This, however, does not seem to be the point that Paul is trying to make in Gal 1:8. For then, by implication, he would be saying something similar about himself. Notably, the same expression as in Gal 1:8, ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, is used in two passages in the Corinthian correspondence. In 1Cor 15:47 it is meant to contrast Jesus as ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ with Adam, ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς κοϊκός, and in 2Cor 5:2 Paul designates the dwelling in which we long to be clothed as ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (cf. 1Thess 1:10; 4:16; see also 2Thess 1:7). Consequently, it is more likely that ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ is a thoroughly positive designation. An "angel from heaven" is presented, alongside Paul, as the one *least likely* to preach the gospel opposed to the one Paul had preached. Yet "least likely" does not mean "absolutely impossible". Even if angels dwell where God and Jesus Christ does, they are not God and do not possess the fullness of knowledge. In consequence, no matter how absurd such a possibility might appear<sup>56</sup> – and indeed, the verse is composed so as to highlight this absurdity – hypothetically even such a good angel, just as Paul himself, could go awry. It is significant that the same is not said about Jesus. It cannot be excluded that Gal 1:8 implies some distance between angels and Paul on the one hand, and Jesus Christ on the other, which would make it even less likely that an identification of Paul with Jesus Christ

54 Zerwick, Greek. The example Zerwick gives is LXX Ps 49:12.

55 It is noteworthy that a first class conditional (εἰ + present indicative) is used in Gal 1:9, which suggests that a contrast was intended between the two verses.

56 Cf. Kurze, Engelsglaube 14: "Er will nicht etwa behaupten, daß tatsächlich einmal ein Engel ein mit dem christlichen nicht übereinstimmendes Evangelium bringen könnte, sonst müßte er ja ebenso mit ἡμεῖς die reale Möglichkeit statuieren, daß er selbst einmal unter die Irrlehrer gehen könnte, was offenbar absurd ist".

is meant in Gal 4:14.<sup>57</sup> Finally, Gal 1:8 by assuming hypothetically that an angel could preach the gospel, attests the belief in the possibility of a revelation mediated by an angel, although the negative context suggests that even if Paul shared this belief, he also saw the dangers implied in it.

None of the occurrences of the term ἄγγελος in the letter to the Galatians is without its problems, yet the one in Gal 3:19 is the most contentious one. V.19 introduces a passage in which Paul comments on the origin, purpose and function of the Mosaic Law<sup>58</sup> (3:19-25). While it is the verse that follows that has been most fiercely debated by exegetes, it is usually discussed in relation to v.19, which in itself presents an exegetical conundrum. Paul begins by asking: "Why then the Law?", and then goes on to explain that "it was added because of transgressions, τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator, διαταγείς δι' ἁγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου". A glance at the variety of interpretations offered by different authors makes one realize that the understanding of this verse is largely influenced by how one conceives of Paul's attitude toward the Law. This is most evident in how the problematic phrase τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν is translated, and second, how the angels' relation to the giving of the Law is explained. It is agreed by nearly everyone that the verb προσετέθη, "it was added", has negative overtones,<sup>59</sup> indicating that the Law is secondary to the promise given to Abraham. Its temporary nature is further emphasized by what follows, where ἄχρις suggests that the "coming of the seed" constitutes the end, or at least the limitation of the Law's reign. Yet why was the law added? The majority of contemporary English translations follows those commentators who propose a causal understanding of the phrase τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν, rendering it as "because of transgressions". The problem is that the prepositional use of χάριν can either have causal or final meaning.<sup>60</sup> Concerning the phrase under consideration χάριν un-

57 See below the comments on Gal 4:14.

58 Most of the commentators concur that νόμος refers to the Mosaic law here; Gaston, Angels, is one of the few to deny this.

59 Longenecker, Galatians 138, makes an apt comment: "It [προσετέθη] introduces an important temporal point: the Mosaic law was brought into effect by God subsequent to his covenant of promise. The fact that the augmented προστίθημι ("add" to something already present) appears in the text and not the simple verb τίθημι ("place", "set up") signals a nuance of disparagement and suggests that the law was not of the essence of God's redemptive activity with humankind".

60 It is used nine times in the NT, but Gal 3:19 is the only occurrence in the Pauline homologoumena. In most of the cases the context makes it evident that the use is causal, while twice it is clear that the meaning is final. In some passages χάριν could be interpreted either way.



derstood as expressing purpose could mean either “in order to produce transgressions”,<sup>61</sup> or more positively, “in order to bring about the knowledge of transgressions” (cognitive function), or in the same line, “in order to define transgressions”.<sup>62</sup> There is no consensus as to the meaning of this phrase in v.19, and the answer to the question “why then the Law” appears to be predetermined by how a given author understands the Law to function in Paul’s thought.

We mentioned the difficulties with translating τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν for, as we shall see shortly, the exegetes’ understanding of the role angels played in giving the Law is often closely linked to their interpretation of this phrase. The statement that the Law was “administered by the angels through a mediator”,<sup>63</sup> an appendix to the main sentence, even though it might look like an afterthought, is hardly an insignificant addition. Before we come to the consequences of this statement for our understanding of the relation between angels and the law, we need to discuss briefly the possible traditions behind Paul’s conviction that the law was ordained by angels. This is not as simple as some commentaries would like to see it.<sup>64</sup> Lloyd Gaston might be exaggerating when he wryly remarks: “the Jewish concept of the role of the angels at the giving of the law ... was well known ... [b]ecause all the commentaries say so, and they copy from one another the relevant proof texts”.<sup>65</sup> It is, however, true that the majority of the alleged “parallels” could be disputed. That angels accompanied God at Mount Sinai, as attested already in LXX Deut 33:2, does not necessarily imply that they *administered* the law. Gnostic texts attributing the creating/giving of the law to angels are not compelling evidence. Finally, pointing to the later tradition that angels initially opposed giving the Law to humans is not convincing, either. Neither in Jub 1:29-2:1 nor in Philo *Somn.* 1:143 do we have to do with an account or even an allusion to angels ordaining the law. We must not, however, dismiss too easily Josephus *Ant.* 15:136 as

61 See Martyn, Galatians 354. Rom 5:20 is usually mentioned as an argument for such an interpretation.

62 Dunn, *Theology* 139, goes even further here, for he takes the phrase to mean “‘in order to deal with transgressions’ – ‘for the sake of transgressions’ in the sense of providing a solution to the problem caused by the breach of the law on the part of those to whom and for whom the law had been given”.

63 The last phrase, ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου has caused relatively little discussion, for it is nearly universally understood to refer to Moses. For two alternative interpretations see, however, Vanhoye, *Médiateur*, and Gaston, *Angels*.

64 The opinion confidently expressed in some commentaries is reflected in the following statement in the EDNT: “The phrase regarding the mediation of the law through the angels ... has, of course, parallels in Judaism” (Broer, ἄγγελος 14; our emphasis).

65 Gaston, *Angels*. His suggestion that Gal 3:19 refers to the law administered by the angels of the nations is not persuasive.

a possible witness to the tradition of angels' involvement in *mediating* the law. The passage does most likely refer to angels and not prophets as it is often claimed, even though Andrew Bandstra might be right that the context is not necessarily the angelic ordering of the law at Sinai.<sup>66</sup> There are also two other New Testament passages which are usually cited in this context, Acts 7:53 and Heb 2:2, and at least the first one does seem to attest a similar tradition to the one mentioned in Galatians. It is thus somewhat ironic that this supposedly well established Jewish "tradition" is best attested in Christian writings.

The fact that in Gal 3:19 angels are reported to have ordained the Law has been interpreted by some scholars as indicating that they are also its authors. J. Louis Martyn's claim that Paul turns the tradition that angels participated in the genesis of the law upside down, "speaking of the angels as the active party who themselves instituted the law, and saying that they did that in God's absence",<sup>67</sup> seems rather far-fetched, but is consistent with his understanding of τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν. Martyn, however, does not go so far as to emphasize the supposedly evil/demonic character of angels in Gal 3:19, as some other authors tend to do.<sup>68</sup>

Scholars often observe that in the letter to the Galatians there appears to be an analogy drawn between "the epoch of the Torah ... and the Gentiles' former status without Christ".<sup>69</sup> Having noticed this resemblance, a number of authors deemed it logical to pursue the analogy further and to identify στοιχεῖα of Gal 4:3,9 with ἄγγελοι of 3:19.<sup>70</sup> This approach, however, is ultimately unconvincing, just as are, often related to that, speculations as to the nature of angels in 3:19. The verse is designed to demonstrate the inferior and temporary character of the Law and to insert certain distance between the Law and God by the fact

66 See Bandstra, Law. He discusses the arguments of those who oppose understanding ἄγγελοι as angels in this context.

67 Martyn, Galatians 357. Among authors who have written on the Pauline understanding of the Law, the angelic origin of the Law is argued for by Räisänen, Paul 130-131; supported by Stanton, Law 113. Räisänen's arguments are convincingly refuted by Thurén, Paul 82-83, who demonstrates how Paul used various rhetorical means to establish the distance between God and the law. Thurén concludes that "different figures – angels and probably also Moses – were involved in the process of communication, but to claim on the basis of v.19 that the use of a mediator indicates that God was not involved at all, is a *non sequitur*" (Thurén, Paul 83.).

68 Cf. n. 70.

69 Stuckenbruck, Angel 104.

70 Räisänen, Paul 131 n. 21, lists the main proponents of this view. Stuckenbruck, Angel 105 n. 144, distinguishes between those who equate both with demonic powers, or just see the alleged identification as based on Paul's intention to "underscore their negative significance". He includes some bibliographical references.

of angelic mediation. That anyone else other than God should be the author of the Law, however, is highly unlikely, and the passive προσ-ετέθη is best understood as a divine passive. In Romans Paul will repeatedly assert the divine origin of the Law. It could be theoretically argued that he changed his mind concerning that since he wrote Galatians. Yet it is more plausible to suppose that statements such as the one in Gal 3:19 were prone to misunderstanding, and as a consequence, in writing Romans Paul was careful not to utter similar statements. As for the “character” of angels in the scheme presented in Galatians, they are certainly not “bad”, they merely execute the divine script, but their role is very limited. Once the administrators of order, it is not evident what their role in the new order could possibly be.

In Gal 4:13-14 Paul commends the Galatians who, when he first came to announce the gospel to them, in spite of his physical infirmity welcomed him “as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus”, ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν. This is by far the most positive reference to an angel in the Pauline corpus. Commentators discuss whether in this passage ἄγγελος could not be simply rendered as “messenger”, yet most conclude that “angel” is the best translation.<sup>71</sup>

From the Hebrew Bible we know the figure of Angel/Messenger of YHWH, particularly difficult to interpret, since it is not always clear whether he is distinct from YHWH himself. The LXX usually translates the phrase as (ὁ) ἄγγελος κυρίου, yet since Paul typically reserves the title κύριος for Jesus Christ, this could explain his reluctance to refer to an “angel of the Lord”. Consequently, it is possible that we have in Gal 4:14 an allusion to this mysterious figure from the Hebrew Bible. It might be added that in one of the most baffling accounts of an appearance of an Angel of YHWH in Judg 13:3-23, the heavenly figure is variously designated, and among others he is referred to as ἄγγελος θεοῦ (Judg 13:6). Interestingly, the expression ἄγγελος (τοῦ) θεοῦ<sup>72</sup> occurs less than ten times in the Septuagint.<sup>73</sup> In around half of those instances the expression is used in a comparison of a human being (more specifically, a king) to an “angel of God”.<sup>74</sup>

71 Cf. Longenecker, Galatians 192: “Paul ... usually uses ἀπόστολος for messenger ..., with ἄγγελος elsewhere in Galatians and Paul’s other writings signifying an extraterrestrial, superhuman being”. See also Betz, Galatians 226 (in n. 69 he names some other commentators who concur that “angel of God” is a more likely translation).

72 In the textual tradition of the LXX we encounter both ἄγγελος θεοῦ and ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ, and it is sometimes difficult to know which one is the more original reading.

73 The expression ὁ ἄγγέλως (του) θεοῦ is slightly more frequent and it usually occurs in contexts different from the ones where ἄγγελος (τοῦ) θεοῦ is used.

74 See LXX 1Kgs 29:9, 2Kgs 14:17 (cf. also v.20) and LXX Esth 5:2. In Judg 13:6 the wife of Manoah describes the appearance of the “man of God” who came to her, compar-

Yet is Paul in Gal 4:14 merely saying to the Galatians: "You welcomed me the way you would have welcomed an angel of God, the way you would have welcomed Christ Jesus" (comparison)? Or does he finally mean: "You welcomed me as being an angel of God, as being Christ Jesus what I am in reality" (identity)?<sup>75</sup> The latter has been argued by Charles Gieschen who thinks that there is evidence indicating that Paul identified himself with an angel, and Gal 4:14 supposedly demonstrates that this was not just "any angel", but God's Angel. In addition, Gieschen claims that this verse should be understood in terms of angelomorphic christology, in that for Paul Jesus Christ *was* God's Angel. According to him, "instead of seeing the clauses in terms of distinct and increasing comparisons, this appositional structure understands the second  $\omega\varsigma$  clause as epexegetical".<sup>76</sup> Since Gieschen bases his interpretation on the way  $\omega\varsigma$  functions in this verse, a few comments about Paul's use of  $\omega\varsigma$  might be in order.

Analyzing the occurrences of  $\omega\varsigma$  in the letters of Paul we come to the conclusion that it frequently means "like", "as" or "as if".  $\omega\varsigma$  thus indicates either similarities ("like", "as"), identity ("as") or illusionary identity ("as if") between the realities that are compared. The question which of the three meanings is present in a particular occurrence can only be answered on the basis of the semantics of the sentence. The fact that one meaning can be clearly identified in one instance says nothing about another instance in the same book or even the same verse. In 2Cor 2:17 of the three uses of  $\omega\varsigma$  the first is comparative whereas the second and third are indicating identity. There are cases where the context clearly indicates one or another of the three meanings, but in other instances the choice is less clear.

In Gal 4:14 the choice might not be obvious, yet the fact that, as opposed to what Gieschen asserts, Paul nowhere else identifies himself with an angel, should caution us against an assumption that he could be implying this in the verse under consideration. Since comparison of

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ing it to ( $\omega\varsigma$ ) the appearance of "an angel of God", ἀγγέλου θεοῦ. The irony is, of course, that at that point she still does not realize that the figure who appeared to her *was* an angel of the Lord (for he is only identified as such by Manoaah v.21). In Gen 21:17 the voice calling Hagar from heaven to ensure her that God has not abandoned her is also referred to as that of "angel of God", yet it would be surprising if Paul were to refer to this passage in a paragraph preceding the one in which he discusses the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, presenting the latter in rather disparaging terms.

75 The paraphrase 'You welcomed me as if I was an angel of God, as if I was Christ Jesus which you know I am not' which expresses illusionary identity could possibly be implied in the Greek text, but not in the NRSV translation.

76 Gieschen, Christology 324.

special personalities such as kings with an angel of God is attested in the Hebrew Bible, it should not come as a surprise that such a comparison could be applied to the Apostle. We thus conclude that ὥς is used in this verse in a comparative way. As for the relationship between the two ὥς clauses, we agree with the majority of exegetes who interpret them “in terms of distinct and increasing comparisons”.<sup>77</sup> Understanding the verse as evidence of angelomorphic christology is rather implausible, because, even if Gieschen was right, Gal 4:14 would still only be an indirect way of presenting Christ as an angel and the only possible reference to angelomorphic christology in Paul. Moreover taking into consideration our understanding of angels in the letters of Paul as belonging more or less to the old order, angels do not seem to be a very likely christological model for Paul.

The comparison in v.14, next to the aforementioned instances of comparisons between humans and “angel of God”, could also, as Kevin Sullivan suggests, allude to the stories known from the Hebrew Bible where humans are reported to have received angels.<sup>78</sup> According to him an allusion to Gen 18 is most probable.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, it is noteworthy that Paul praises the Galatians for receiving him so hospitably, indeed “in a way befitting the reception of a divine guest”,<sup>80</sup> *in spite of* his physical condition. Betz points to the parallel between “thorn in the flesh”, σκόλοψι τῇ σαρκί in 2Cor 12:7 and the phrase “in the flesh”, ἐν τῇ σαρκί in Gal 4:14.<sup>81</sup> According to him, σκόλοψι τῇ σαρκί is “a metaphor describing Paul’s illness as caused by an evil demon residing in his body”.<sup>82</sup> The expression Paul uses, however, is ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, not δαιμόνιον, and there is no indication that this “angel of Satan” is to be identified with an “evil demon”. Yet it is noteworthy that if 2Cor 12:7 indeed refers to an illness, and in Galatians Paul has

77 Gieschen, Christology 324.

78 Sullivan, Wrestling 124-125.

79 Cf. Sullivan, Wrestling 124: “It is relatively certain that Paul has in mind the Abraham cycle (Gen 16-21) in his arguments concerning those who are heirs to the promise, since Abraham appears by name seven times in Gal 3. However, the idea that Paul might have had in mind the Gen 18 visitation of angels (and God) to Abraham has not been explored”. In the Genesis account Sarah and Abraham’s guests are not explicitly identified as angels, yet they were interpreted as such in later tradition. Cf. also Heb 13:2, which possibly alludes to similar traditions of hospitality extended to angels. Attridge, Epistle 386, next to Gen 18:2-15, cites other examples of human encounters with angels from the Hebrew Bible as a possible background of Heb 13:2: Gen 19:1-14; Judg 6:11-18; 13:3-22; Tob 12:1-20. The echo of the same texts could perhaps be also heard in Gal 4:14.

80 Sullivan, Wrestling 124.

81 Betz, Galatians 225.

82 Betz, Galatians 225.

the same physical condition in mind as in 2Corinthians, there would be a remarkable irony involved: Galatians received as “angel of God” the one whom “angel of Satan” tormented. Hence, paradoxically, even if Gal 4:14 uses a traditional motif of a human being compared to an angel of God, and/or alludes to certain traditions of hospitality extended to angels, the image is subverted in that instead of a dazzling angelic appearance we are presented with the weak, suffering Apostle.

The term ἄγγελος appears once more in the undisputed Paulines, in the letter to the Romans, this time in the plural and with no article. In Rom 8:38 ἄγγελοι are named alongside ἀρχαί among a number of entities about which it is affirmed that none of them will be able to separate believers “from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”, ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν (v.39). There has been much debate about the nature of the specific entities listed in these verses. Some authors understand all of them as referring to specific “powers”, and thus take these verses to be a more or less comprehensive inventory of Pauline “powers”.<sup>83</sup> However, such a general “list” of spiritual powers which need to be neutralized/depotentiated<sup>84</sup> in order to ensure God’s definitive reign is more likely intended in 1Cor 15:24, if it is to be seen anywhere in Pauline literature.<sup>85</sup> In Rom 8:38-39 the purpose is not so much to make a catalogue of specific powers, as to bring to the climax the point made already at the beginning of the pericope. In v.31, where the “concluding doxology to the central theological section of Romans begins to gain momentum”,<sup>86</sup> Paul asks rhetorically: “If God is for us, who is against us?” The entire pericope Rom 8:31-39 is intended to demonstrate the greatness and invincibility of God’s love,<sup>87</sup> from which absolutely *nothing* can separate the believers: neither various hardships provoked by humans (cf. v.35),<sup>88</sup> nor any of the elements comprising the universe. The pair that has provoked most speculations in these verses is height (ὕψωμα) and depth (βάθος), with some exegetes

83 This seems to be implied in the discussion of heavenly powers in Dunn, *Theology* 104-110, although he suggests that “Paul himself did not have a very strong, or at least very clear, belief regarding these heavenly powers” (Dunn, *Theology* 108-109).

84 We agree with Wink, *Naming* 51-52, that the translation of καταργέω as “to destroy” is problematic.

85 See section 1 above.

86 Wink, *Naming* 48.

87 In v.35 Paul refers to “the love of Christ” and in v.39 to “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”, thus the two seem to be synonymous.

88 Wink, *Naming* 48, rightly observes that v.35 lists “the sanctions of primarily human powers, a fact that is usually overlooked in this paragraph, where all the attention tends to gravitate toward the cosmic powers in vv.38-39”.

finding here astrological references to the position of stars.<sup>89</sup> Yet astrological writings that contain these terms are later, and such an interpretation “overlooks the direct connection of the pair to create a unit of thought”.<sup>90</sup> It is more logical to assume that οὔτε ὕψωμα οὔτε βάθος, together with οὔτε ἐνεστώτα οὔτε μέλλοντα, “provide ... an exhaustive sweep of all the spatio-temporal dimensions, after the fashion of Ps. 139:8-9, where spatial imagery is used to express the impossibility of escaping the presence of God”.<sup>91</sup> Elaborate speculations concerning specific terms in this list are thus largely beside the point, and for our purpose it is only important to note that the existence of angels must have been deemed obvious enough by Paul to be named as one of the significant components of the created universe. That they form one pair with ἀρχαί does suggest that they belong to the same category, but does not mean that they are interchangeable, rather on the contrary. According to James Dunn, this couple is “unusual”, for the “normal pairing is ἀρχή/ἐξουσία”.<sup>92</sup> It might indeed surprise us that ἐξουσίαι are not mentioned in Rom 8:38-39, yet we need to remember that the only verse where this supposedly “normal” pairing occurs in the undisputed Paulines is 1Cor 15:24. Only in Colossians and Ephesians does this become a “standard” association. The fact that ἀρχαί and ἄγγελοι constitute one pair has led some scholars to speculate, based on the antithetical character of the three other pairs, that in this context ἄγγελοι are “good”, whereas ἀρχαί represent evil spirits. They usually admit, however, that we cannot ascertain this for sure.<sup>93</sup> This is indeed rather speculative, especially since the nicely parallel structure of pairings is disrupted by the intrusion of δυνάμεις and the conclusion of the list with τις κτίσις ἑτέρα. This alone should caution us against defining too strictly the categories involved. If, however, we insist on opposing ἀρχαί to ἄγγελοι, the contrast involved by no means needs to refer to their alleged “morality”.

The mention of “any other creature” incidentally implies the creaturely nature of all the preceding elements, including angels, and obviously this was in agreement with the creatureliness of angels in con-

89 Schreiner, Romans 465, n. 20, mentions the commentators who support this view.

90 Carr, Angels 113.

91 Wink, Naming 50. Wink took the reference to Psalm 139 from Carr, Angels 113. In this context he as well as other commentators also refer to Eph 3:18.

92 Dunn, Romans 498.

93 Cf., e.g., Murray, Epistle 332-333; Moo, Epistle 545, observes that “it is natural to think that ‘rulers’ denotes evil spiritual powers, but the lexical evidence makes it impossible to be sure”. Schreiner, Romans 465, thinks that “the powers described are likely evil, for good angels would not separate believers from their Lord”, which shows that the author does not take into account the rhetorical context. One would need to ask whether “any other creature” also necessarily needs to be “evil”.

temporary Jewish literature. Naming all the possible categories that comprise “every conceivable condition of humankind”, establish spatio-temporal boundaries of the entire universe, and embrace the totality of creation, including the supernatural realm, allows Paul to show most emphatically the abundance, power and reliability of God’s love, specifically manifested in the Christ event (cf. v.32).

#### 4. Ἄγγελοι in the Pauline Antilegomena

Outside of the Pauline homologoumena ἄγγελοι are even less frequent. In Colossians there is only one, yet a particularly notorious occurrence of the term, in 2:18. The contentious issue refers to how to understand the phrase “worship of angels”, θρησκεία τῶν ἁγγέλων. The literature devoted to the topic is extensive, but the passage is still disputed. Traditionally the verse has often been taken as evidence of the cultic veneration of angels, that is interpreting ἁγγέλων as objective genitive.<sup>94</sup> While the existence of angel cult among Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, albeit difficult to ascertain, cannot be excluded, with regard to Col 2:18 another explanation has gained much popularity in the last few decades. Fred O. Francis has argued that it is more plausible to take ἁγγέλων in this verse as a subjective genitive.<sup>95</sup> The phrase would be then referring to the worship *performed* by angels, that is to angelic liturgy, similar to the one well attested in Qumran and elsewhere in Jewish literature. Francis’ view has not been accepted by everyone,<sup>96</sup> however, even if “scholarship is moving in this direction”.<sup>97</sup> In any case, whoever the author of the letter was, it is clear that he is dealing with a specific local problem, and the concern is here with a certain behaviour deemed undesirable rather than the character of angels as such.

In 2Thessalonians we come across ἄγγελοι in the context that to some extent resembles the one in 1Thessalonians. Yet there are some signifi-

94 Stuckenbruck, Angel 111, n. 161, lists the most important references. See also Stuckenbruck, Angel 113-115, for other interpretations that have been proposed by scholars.

95 See Francis, Humility. Cf. also Rowland, Visions, who concurs with Francis’ understanding of the genitive but offers a more compelling interpretation of the rest of the verse. See Stuckenbruck, Angel 116, n. 177 for the list of authors who support the subjective genitive reading of Col 2:18. Stuckenbruck himself proposes to reconcile both interpretations, instead of posing a disjunction between subjective and objective genitives.

96 Cf. especially Arnold, Syncretism.

97 Sullivan, Sexuality 220, n. 28. Cf. also Stuckenbruck, Angel 116, n. 177 for the names of authors who support this interpretation.



cant differences,<sup>98</sup> not only in that in 2Thess not one archangel, but angels in the plural are mentioned. The image is also that of the end time coming of the Lord ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ. The term used to describe the event, however, is ἀποκάλυψις, not παρουσία, as in 1Thess 4:15 (cf. also 1Thess 2:19; 3:13; 5:23). As F.F. Bruce observes, from v.7 to 10 "the language is largely a cento of theophanic phrases from OT, what is said of 'the Lord' (Yahweh) in them being applied to 'the Lord Jesus' here".<sup>99</sup> Angels are thus depicted as Jesus' heavenly host, "in a flaming fire." The Lord is said to come to "inflict punishment" (v.8), an element that was absent from 1Thess 4:16. It is not evident how to understand αὐτοῦ in the phrase ἄγγελοι δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ. If it refers to ἄγγελοι, then the image is that of "angels of power", that is "mighty angels".<sup>100</sup> If, however, we associate it with δυνάμεως, then angels would be presented here as ministers of Jesus' power.

In the Pastoral Epistles ἄγγελοι, always in the plural, occur twice in 1Timothy, and there is a marked difference when compared with the homologoumena. In 1Tim 3:16 the phrase ὡφθῇ ἀγγέλοις is a part of a christological hymn. The reference to angels is anarthrous and most likely designates a generic category. Some authors have tried to link this phrase with resurrection, understanding ἄγγελοι as (human) messengers, yet this interpretation is rejected by most commentators.<sup>101</sup> Even taking the term to refer to heavenly beings we cannot be sure what precisely angels are said to have seen. If the reference is to incarnation, then it could suggest "the fuller knowledge of Christ's person which was opened out to the heavenly host by the incarnation".<sup>102</sup> Such an interpretation would imply that the angels' knowledge was incomplete prior to that event, yet their witness to incarnation would at the same time attribute to it additional splendour. This would be even more evident if subsequent exaltation rather than incarnation were meant, that is if the phrase stresses "the worship accorded by angelic powers to the ascending, glorified Christ".<sup>103</sup> The difficulties in deter-

98 Gaventa, *Thessalonians* 105, fittingly characterizes the contrast between the two images of the parousia: "1 Thessalonians 4 promises that Jesus' return will bring comfort to believers, who will be united with him and with those believers who have died. Here [in 2Thessalonians 1] ... Jesus comes as the awesome eschatological judge, the one who wreaks vengeance on the church's enemies by banishing them eternally and revealing his own glory".

99 Bruce, *Thessalonians* 151.

100 Frame, *Commentary* 232, gives a reference to 1En. 61.10 and T. Jud. 3.10.

101 See, e.g., Lock, *Commentary* 46; Kelly, *Commentary* 91.

102 Bernard, *Epistles*, as quoted in Kelly, *Commentary* 91.

103 Kelly, *Commentary* 91. Contra Kelly, however, nothing suggests that there is an allusion in this phrase to the "triumph over the world of spirits". Dibelius, *Geisterwelt*

mining the object of the angelic seeing are related to the fact that the arrangement of individual clauses spelling out the “mystery of our religion” in 1Tim 3:16 is not entirely clear. In particular, we do not know whether the order is meant to be chronological or if there is some other clue to the arrangement.

In another occurrence in the same letter “the elect angels”, οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ ἄγγελοι are listed together with God and Christ Jesus as witnesses to the author’s warning to keep his instructions, as if serving to give more splendour to the authority of the first two. According to J.N.D. Kelly, the author “invokes God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels because the final judgment will be in their hands”.<sup>104</sup> Commentators often point out that designating angels as “elect” is intended to contrast them with “fallen” angels, yet such a contrast is not necessarily implied here. If the main thought is indeed that (some) angels will share in judgment, this attributes to them a position conspicuously different from the one they are accorded in the undisputed Paulines (note especially 1Cor 6:3).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The study of ἄγγελος in the letters of Paul proved to be a difficult undertaking. As we saw, the occurrences of ἄγγελος are comparatively infrequent and sporadic in the homologoumena. Each occurrence has manifold challenges for the interpreter. While Paul’s implicit and explicit angelology betrays elements of continuity with biblical and apocryphal angelology, each occurrence is beset with problems that cannot easily be solved within the framework of what we know of Paul’s inherited theological tradition. On the background of his faith in Christ, for Paul the angels lost much of the mythical splendour which they clearly had in some contemporary Jewish circles. There is nothing in Paul’s letters that would lead us to believe that Paul had even the slightest doubt concerning the existence of angels. At the same time Paul does not refrain from a certain amount of irony in his presentation of angels which subverted some aspects of the established traditions. For Paul the Christ event is so central that everything else, including the angels lost their ultimate significance. In his letters the angels appear as guardians of the old at the dawn of the new.

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180, also thinks that the reference is to exaltation, but he explains it in a different way: “bei seiner Menschwerdung war Christus den Engelmächten verborgen geblieben, nun wird er ihnen sichtbar als Herr der Herrlichkeit”. If this were the case, one would wonder why angels are so often presented as spectators of human affairs.

104 Kelly, Commentary 127.

It would certainly not do justice to Paul to try to impose on his use of ἄγγελος the angelology of some apocryphal writings according to which in a mythical protological event the angels were divided into the angels of God and the angels of Satan and since then form opposing armies which are constantly involved in battle with each other. What we learn from his letters is rather that for Paul angels were part of creation and like all of creation were in need of final reconciliation.

In Paul's letters the dividing lines between good and evil angels are not as static and insurmountable as is frequently assumed. Rather in Paul's perspective angels are prone to temptation and susceptible to being used by Satan for his own purposes. This is evident from the fact that in Paul's letters angels that are unambiguously positive are explicitly characterized as such (cf. "angel of light", "angel from heaven", "angel of God"). Angels that are negative are equally marked explicitly (cf. "angel of Satan"). Angels that are not explicitly qualified can only be identified as good or evil in the context. In many cases it is difficult to resolve a certain ambiguity. Paul's implicit or explicit moral qualifications of the angels are not absolute or static. These designations do not refer to the unchanging ontological character of the angels, but rather point to the specific contextual function in which we meet them. Paul's understanding of the angels is far from underpinning an ontological dualism of good and evil. Rather, as with Satan, the angels whether they are qualified as evil or good are presented as beings that are ultimately in the service of God bringing God's designs to fulfillment. On this point, as several interpreters rightly point out, Paul's thinking is in line with the theology of the framing narrative of the book of Job (see 1:6-12; 2:1-7).

In the deutero-Pauline letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians where the language of "powers and principalities" becomes particularly prominent, angels are decidedly marginalized, even more so than in the undisputed Paulines. However, in the Pastorals, although references to angels are not very frequent, when they occur, as in 1 Timothy, there is no trace of disregard for angels, unless we take the possible hint at their incomplete knowledge in 3:16 as a sign of disregard. When they are mentioned, it is with utmost respect and in contexts that rather enhance their authority and position. Thus at least in this respect Paul's imitators differ from his model. It is rather the author of the letter to the Hebrews who spelled out what remained implicit in the Pauline homologoumena, namely that the Christ event placed the heavenly hierarchies in a new perspective, and the position of angels has to be radically re-evaluated when the superiority of Jesus, who took on flesh, suffered, and was subsequently exalted, is correctly

affirmed.<sup>105</sup> Thus incarnation has permitted human beings to aspire to a position far above that previously reserved for angels.<sup>106</sup>

Toward the end of his 1918 essay, Maurice Jones asserts: "The Christian believer had no further need of them [angels] as mediators to link him up with God, for God was no longer transcendent and inaccessible, but was brought very near in Christ Jesus."<sup>107</sup> A similar explanation of the subordinate role of angels in the Pauline letters was already expressed by Otto Everling.<sup>108</sup> In such an argumentation, however, lurks the view, common among scholars until fairly recently, according to which the increased importance attributed to angels in postexilic Jewish literature is due to the significant weakening of the original Jewish monotheism and, related to that, the fact that God in Judaism became allegedly so distant that believers could only have access to him through mediators, hence myriads of angels and other heavenly beings.<sup>109</sup> This opinion, with its strong anti-Jewish overtones, has rightly come under criticism in the last few decades.<sup>110</sup> Scholars who reject this view attempt to find an alternative way to account for the prominence accorded to angels in postexilic Judaism. They argue that the profusion of angelic beings of various ranks in much of the postexilic literature served to *enhance* rather than to limit the significance of the God of Israel, to demonstrate his power, which reached "to all areas of the world", so that "all operations of the world are under his control."<sup>111</sup> If they are right, then perhaps the diminished emphasis on angels in Paul could also be accounted for by the fact that for him all this was accomplished in Christ. So paradoxically, Christ's, and by implication, the believers' (or at least Paul's and possibly other apostles') weakness was sufficient to manifest God's power.<sup>112</sup> In Paul's scheme there was no need anymore for angelic hosts to display the divine might.

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105 Cf. the conclusion of the article by Georg Gäbel on angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews in this volume.

106 It is significant that the term used often in Jewish literature to designate angels, namely the "holy ones", is nearly exclusively reserved for Christians in the Pauline letters, with a possible exception in 1Thess 3:13 (cf. Bruce, Thessalonians 73).

107 Jones, Paul 424-425.

108 See n. 3.

109 According to Hurtado, God 24-25, this view, albeit widespread already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gained even more popularity due to the influential work of Bousset (Bousset, Religion).

110 See Hurtado, God 25-27, who refers to a number of authors whose works have shown that this common opinion has no foundation in the sources.

111 Hurtado, God 25.

112 See esp. 2Cor 4:7-11; cf. also our final comments on Gal 4:14.

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